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FAMOUS ANTIQUE SPORTING PRINTS

THERE is no treatise on the chase in the wide world of letters relating thereto, that stands quite so much by itself, and can claim to be the best in its particular branch, as does the work written by Gaston de Foix, more than five hundred years ago. The praise meted out to this prince by his contemporaries, amongst whom the chronicler Froissart is probably the best known, cannot fail to find echo in the modern sportsman's heart as he turns over the leaves of "La Livre de Chasse," treasured in the National Library of France at Paris. Each page is a masterpiece by itself. The miniature that adorns it, not standing alone or lost in the text like the illustrations of modern books, is surrounded by ever-varying designs of graceful foliage framing it and connecting it with the clear and decorative text. Each miniature portrays in colours that have lost little of their beautiful freshness some hunting scene, be it the mere picture of the various animals of the chase and of venery, or the methods of their capture, or the different kinds of hounds then used by the sportsmen. They stand out with unrivalled distinctness and with picturesque force against quaint patterned backgrounds lavishly decorated with burnished gold—in a word we are contemplating the absolute page beautiful and the perfect book. Gaston de Foix commenced the "Livre de Chasse" in May, 1387, and had only just completed it when he died in August, 1391.

It was in the great hall in his famous stronghold Orthez, that Gaston de Foix, after finishing his supper—the only daily meal he partook of—which he did sitting in stately grandeur at a raised table, his knights and gentlemen-in-waiting holding flambeaux in their hands, would dictate to one of his four secretaries the chapters of his famous hunting-book, while the four historical greyhounds Tristan, Hector, Brun, and Rolland, which Froissart had brought him from England, lay stretched before the great fire.

Mediæval hunting had none of the steeplechase elements about it which are now a sine qua non. Men went hunting in a leisurely manner, and they were out to enjoy a long day's sport; if night overtook them far from home in the depth of the forest, they knew how to make the best of an unpleasant incident. They knew much more than we moderns do of the "nature" of the beast they were hunting, of its habits and wiles, of its stratagems and ruses. They studied wild nature with a keenness unblunted by intellectual occupations, and they loved her with unstinted devotion. To see the play of the sun's rays in the forest's foliage, or to hear the song of the birds in the dewy morn delighted their senses, and they loved to listen to the brave music of their deep-toned hounds as they gave tongue in wooded glades. The chief pleasure did not lie in the slaying of the hart, but rather in the incidents that led up to it. To watch their pack

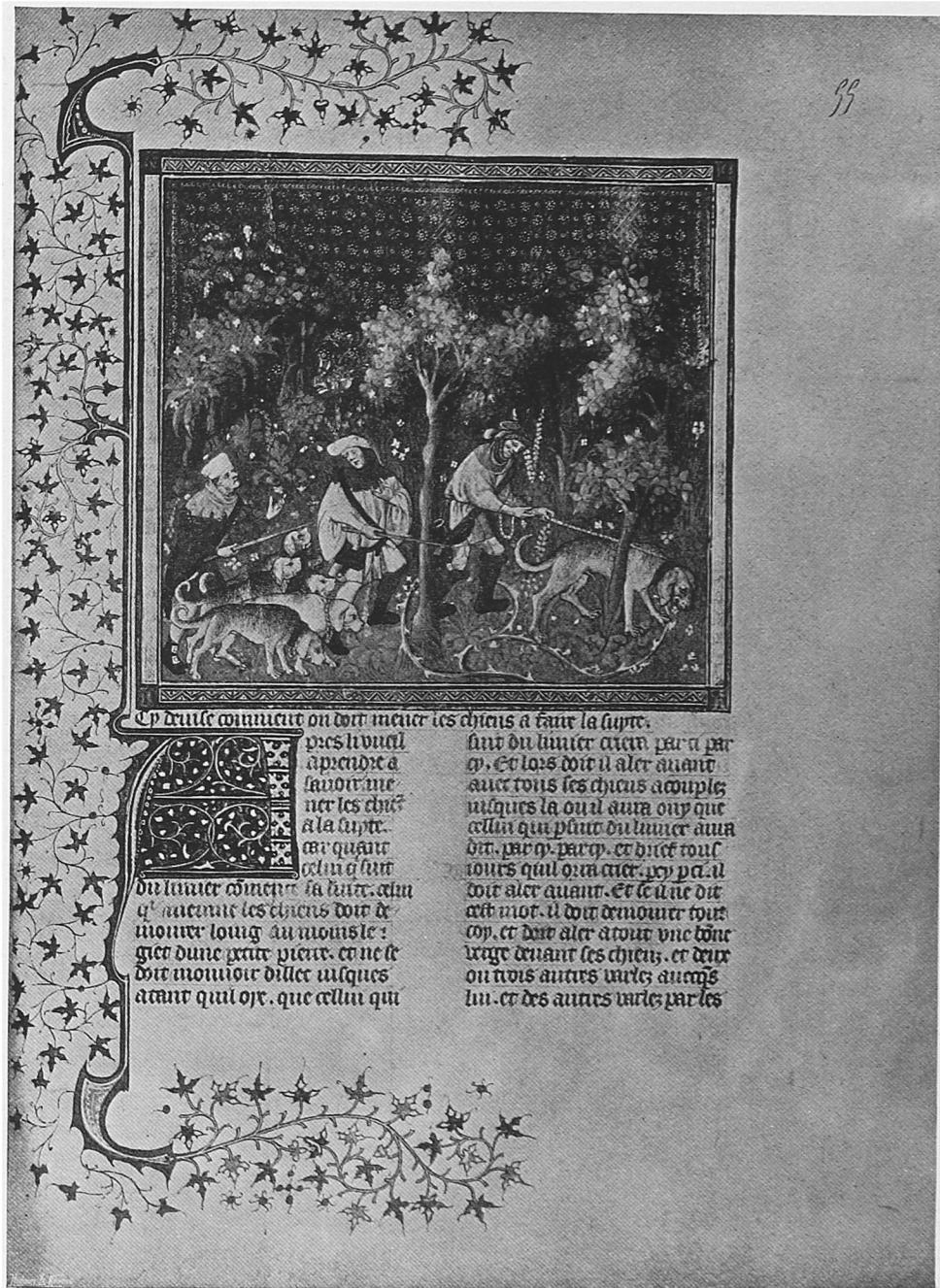
at work, to cheer them on with their voices, chiding them when they ran riot or were at fault, checking them when they were hunting the change, these were the principal attractions. And when the great hart was at last at bay, or the fierce boar finally turned upon his relentless foes, the foam-flecked steed was pushed to a last effort, so as to be at their side before antlers or tusks could work havoc. And the killing itself was a true test of nerve, skill, and strength. It was done in a knightly fashion, without the use of unchivalrous wiles or taking refuge to cross-bow or long-bow. For the death-stroke had to be given with cold steel, and, needless to say, to approach close enough to a cornered hart, standing with lowered head, his rear guarded by rocks or by a big tree, so as to give the deadly thrust with a short hunting sword, was a feat that required grit of the true sort; while in the case of a big boar, dealing out strokes of his deadly tusks with lightning rapidity, it was, if it was performed on horseback, a deed requiring not only the above qualities but perfect horsemanship.

The illustration reproduced here from "La Livre de Chasse" shows not only the berner, or tufter as we now call him, with his lymer in leash, hot on the stag's line, but behind him a couple of hunt officials with six coupled running hounds. The turn of these latter will come presently when the berner, after stealthily approaching the stag's lair, where some hours before he has harboured his unconscious victim, will put him to speedy flight. For after marking him down, soon after dawn, the berner has returned to the assembly, as the meeting-place was

called, and has reported there to his master what signs he has discovered and what size he judged the stag to be. And only if his report sounded more promising than those of his rival bernes, who had worked up other beats, will his particular stag have been picked out for that day's hunting, thereby making him a happy individual. But woe to him if his signs have played him false and his report prove untrue, or by some unlucky chance the stag in the interval of some hours has for some cause or other sneaked away or been alarmed by some unforeseen noise or whiff of humanity!

Joannes van der Straet, commonly known as Stradanus (1523-1605) a native of beautiful, sad Bruges, was the most famous creator of "sporting prints" of his day. For unknown reasons, possibly in consequence of the odium attached to his patronymic since the day when a forbear was mixed up with the murder of Charles the Good of Flanders, Stradanus put aside his own aristocratic name and, following the then fashionable fad, latinised it. But he was destined to become known under a third name, for the Florentines, amongst whom he lived for upwards of fifty years, insisted on calling him Giovanni della Strada. All his fellow artists and writers on art agreed that he was a great designer with a free, spirited style, wonderful imagination, power of invention and extraordinary diligence. His fame at the time was great, and he was among the elect that adorned the monument of his immortal master, Michael Angelo.

Stradanus came to Florence in the year 1553, at the height of the great art-loving Duke Cosimo de Medici's



The Tuftier with his Lymer on the Stag's Line
From Gaston de Foix's Ms. painted about 1440.

career, and until 1571 when he resigned his post of designer to the celebrated Arazzia Medicæ, the tapestry works at Florence which Cosimo had called into being, the artist was principally engaged in decorative work. Some of his tapestry designs dealt with sport, and it was probably the almost instantaneous success of these more or less novel designs that led him to throw up his engagements at the tapestry works and devote himself to the subject that had made him suddenly famous. The world had grown weary of contemplating sentimental, allegorical, or legendary fables or incidents of ancient history, and the spiritedly drawn stag-hunt or the lively encounter with lions or elephants in African jungles that issued from Stradanus' studio in endless variety, took the world by storm. He seems to have been the first artist who realised the commercial advantages that could be derived from a business-like exploitation of this newly arisen craving for sporting pictures. Up to then even such great artists as Dürer, Cranach, Burgkmaier, and Van Orley found purchasers for their productions without much system, dealing, as hucksters would, directly with their customer, bartering the portrait, or saint, or whatever it happened to be, for silverware, or a curiosity of some kind, or cash. To this Stradanus put an end by entering into a partnership with Antwerp's then most famous engraver, one Hieronymus Cock and, on his death soon afterwards, with a yet more strenuous family of artists and art publishers, the Galle, who were then coming greatly to the fore.

No less than 104 of his plates are assembled in the volume entitled "Ven-

ationes." The designs are spirited, but some of the sport therein recorded rivals in imagination the tales of Baron Munchausen. But in dealing with Stradanus' pictures of sport, we must remember that incredible ignorance concerning natural history was still prevalent, and people still believed in the existence of the Virgin-hunting Monosceros, the crocodile-devouring Idrus, the sickle-horned Aptaleon, the Onocentaur, in shape half-man half-donkey, the sly monster of the sea known as the Cetus, the living peripatetic root called Mandragore, whose plaintive cry meant sudden death to those who heard it, and other like strange creatures. Yet besides legendary sport described by some of Stradanus' pictures, there are delineations which represented sport that actually prevailed in his day, and though many of his details are faulty, there exists no work of that time which gives a more complete picture of what the chase of wild animals was like in the second half of the sixteenth century, and none that gives more details regarding the arms of the chase.

The amusing picture of a bear-hunt is reproduced from Stradanus, but it is impossible to assert that this method of attacking bears was ever really in use. The inscription: "Men in full armour attack the savage bears with swords. The bears, clutching the men with their hooked claws, try to get them down, and standing upright grasp the slippery armour in vain, till at last they fall pierced through the entrails," tells what one can see for oneself in the picture.

Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630), was the most talented of Stradanus' pupils.

By some critics this Florentine, who worked for many years in Rome, is considered to have been a very able etcher, but somehow his work lacks the personal note, and acids having been used to an unusual extent by him his etchings appear dark and harsh, however spiritedly they are designed, and how-

sels, Amsterdam and Antwerp with wares that were nothing but cribs from Tempesta's "originals," if one can so call his plates which were so obviously inspired by his erstwhile master's works.

An interesting etching of his reproduced here is believed to be the earliest



Men in Armor Hunt Bears. By Stradanus, 1578

ever deft the touch of the graver enhancing the "bite."

Tempesta sitting in his Roman workshop, for studio would be giving too grand a name to the Bottega where he and his assistants and pupils turned out some 1700 or 1800 plates, had established for himself a European reputation. In all art centres on the Continent scores of engravers were busily providing the printsellers of Rome, Basel, Frankfurt, Cologne, Paris, Brus-

picture known by a European artist, that shows a lady riding astride, habited especially for this purpose in what one must describe as most practical garments. It is generally believed that Anne of Bohemia, Richard II's Queen, introduced the siddle saddle into England. This attribution can only be correct if the word be understood in the modern sense, i.e. a saddle provided with a horn or other contrivance over which the right leg is placed. And

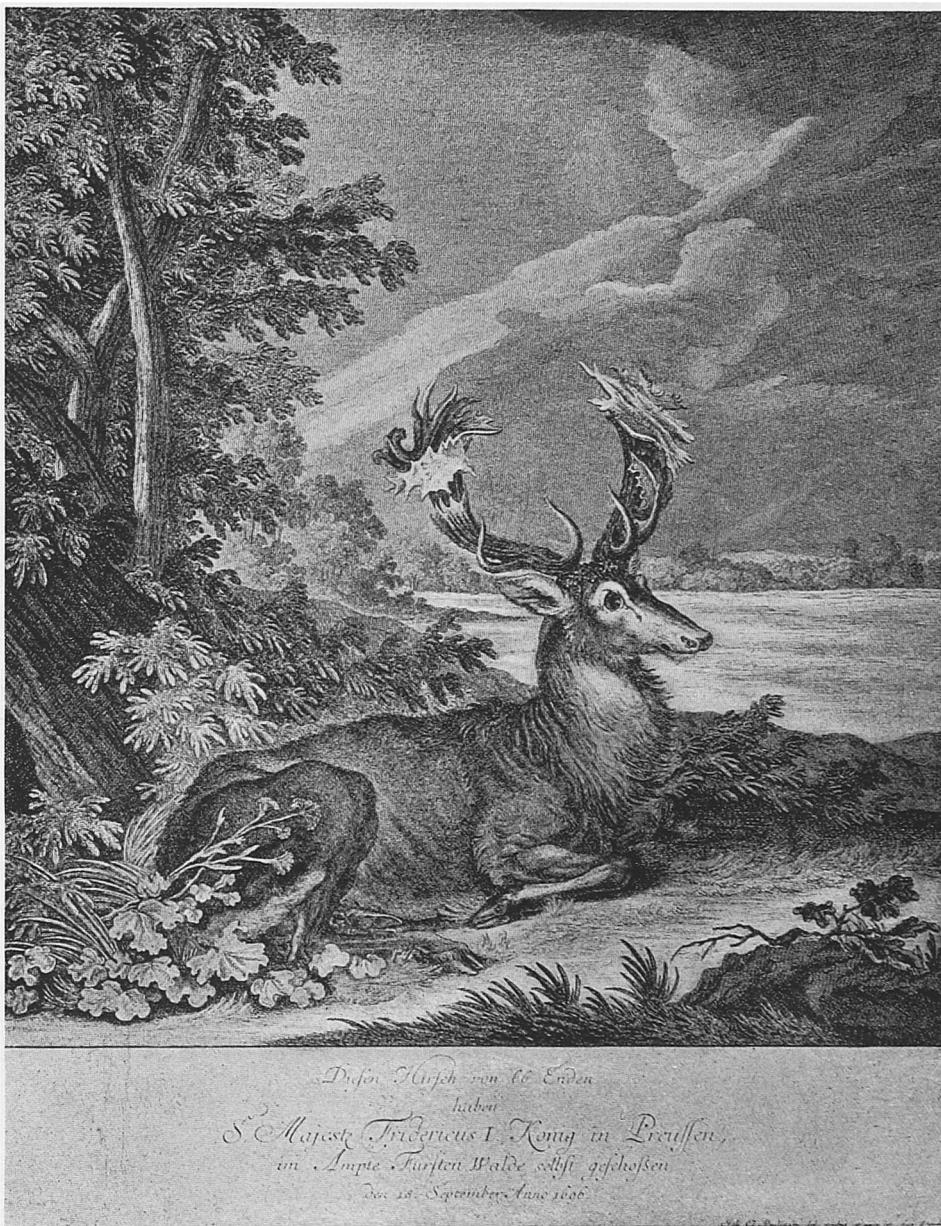
though this early ascription is in conflict with Brantôme's assertion that Catherine de Medicis was the first woman to use such a contrivance, the fact that women's saddles underwent a very gradual development may partly explain and reconcile these contradictions. It is certain that women rode both ways at much earlier periods: when they travelled they sat either "pillion" or, as the Anglo-Norman historian Odericus Vitalis has it, "in female fashion on women's saddles;" when they hunted they rode as often as not astride of their mounts; so that for women to ride astride is nothing new. Chaucer's description of the Wife of Bath who had a "foot mantel" round her hips, which is one of our earliest allusions to a riding-habit, can hardly have applied to the ancient side-seat saddle where the feet rested on a footboard, such as we see in the pictures of Queen Elizabeth in Turberville's "*Arte of Venerie*," for we are told in the Canterbury Tales that the wife wore sharp spurs on both feet.

One serious difficulty in any enquiry as to the period when the modern side-saddle was introduced, arises from the crude nature of early pictures, and it is not until we get to the second half of the sixteenth century that we reach a development of art which permits us to make use of such evidence. The earliest picture dealing intelligently with our subject is the aforesaid etching by Tempesta. The picture indeed is one at which Diana would have turned pale, for the attendant running beside the horse, holding it by the bridle, is evidently there to stay, and the fair one's grip with both hands on the high saddle-bow in front of her does

not increase our respect for her equestrian skill. But what it lacks in sporting spirit it atones for respecting costume. In what region of Italy the artist had visualised this shapely leg garbed in so altogether useful a manner, or what fair aspirant to Diana's graces had served as model for that graceful garter-sash with pendant ends, and for the knickerbocker inexpressibles, we unfortunately are not told.

What Landseer accomplished for the sportsmen of the nineteenth century, what Van Orley, Stradanus and Hans Bol did for the sixteenth, and Tempesta, Barlow and Snyders for the seventeenth, that Johann Elias Ridinger (1698-1767) performed for the sportsmen of the eighteenth century. Indeed, in prolificness, so far as sport is concerned, he outstripped them all, for it is no exaggeration to say that Ridinger left us more sporting pictures, either designed or engraved by him, than did all the above-named artists collectively. He produced in about forty-five years some 1500 engravings or designs for engravings, of which quite 1000 deal with sport, principally deer and other animals of the chase, dogs and horses, or of scenes connected with hunting: a record not easily beaten.

Few chateaux or country mansions in Germany are without a row of his spirited hunting scenes to adorn corridors, gun-rooms, or halls. To the historian, sportsman, and naturalist Ridinger's prints afford an endless field for study. The accuracy with which the methodical artist worked, and the habit he had of giving all interesting or unusual details in the legends underneath the pictures, which occasion-



The Celebrated "Sixty-Six Pointer," Shot in 1696,
by Frederick I of Prussia. By Ridinger

ally extend to several hundred words in length, supply us with interesting material. His deer and other forest animals are generally very life-like, particularly when in motion. In no detail can Ridinger's accuracy be better observed than in his antlers of deer. Their complex form few artists succeed in drawing correctly, a bit of criticism from which we cannot even exempt Landseer, whose Highland deer are almost invariably the bearers of trophies of an exaggerated size, such as never graced the muckle harts of that region, where long inbreeding, poor food, and scant shelter have reduced both the body and the antlers of the native red deer. Landseer was a great admirer of Ridinger, whose work, he said, "left little or no room for others to improve."

One of the longest series of Ridinger's engravings is the one called "The Most Wonderful Stags," consisting of just one hundred plates. It is a series which appeals specially to the antler-collecting sportsman, for it shows us some of the finest trophies garnered in foreign forests in days when this noble beast still flourished and waxed great. Antler lore has always had great attractions to sportsmen, perhaps more for men of the old school than for those of the twentieth century, for now quantity rather than quality seems to be the chief end, and the two cannot go together. Our illustration is a picture of the stag which carried the trophy about which, of all others, the most has been written—and fabled. It is a famous sixty-six pointer, grassed nearly two and a quarter centuries ago (September 18, 1696) by the flint-lock of the first King of Prussia, when he was still Elector of Brandenburg. As Ridinger

was not born till two years after the stag's death, we know that the artist could have had only the antlers to draw from. These are fairly accurately copied, for one can easily compare the drawing with the original, which still hangs in the lofty Presence Chamber of Moritzburg, the ancient hunting castle of the rulers of Saxony. How the head got there is told in the well-known story of one of the most curious barters ever made. The successor of the lucky slayer of this huge stag, the second King of Prussia, cared less for his ancestor's trophy than for tall grenadiers, as those familiar with their Carlyle will remember. His contemporary, the Elector Frederick of Saxony, on the other hand, was a great collector of antlers. Hence it came to pass, so the story hath it, that in the year 1727 a company of the tallest grenadiers to be found in the fair realm of Saxony marched Brandenburg way, while the much-desired sixty-six-tined antlers were sent with three other fine stags' heads under suitable convoy to the Saxon capital, near which, as already mentioned, they can be inspected to this day by the student of antler lore. The marble monument which was erected by the delighted sportsman where the great stag ended his days was visible until lately, but, like most similar mementoes of lucky shots, which it was the fashion to erect, it has now disappeared.

To the critical eye of the modern sportsman-naturalist this head is disappointing, for, unlike other trophies preserved in what to-day is undoubtedly the most interesting collection of antlers in the world, it is an undersized, not to say stunted trophy, on

which the tines are by no means well developed or of fine proportions. But there it hangs, a trophy more curious than beautiful.

Between it and the pair of antlers bagged in 1898 by a descendant of the first King of Prussia, the present Emperor William, in his Rominten forest, there is, curiously enough, considerable resemblance, for the tines on this trophy are likewise "bunched" on top, forming a cluster of spikes, rather than the branching forest of well-developed "offers" one expects to see. In body the Emperor's stag could not compare

with the giant his ancestor killed, for the latter weighed more than twice as much, viz. 59 stone 9 lb. against 29 stone 2 lb. as the animals fell. Whether the Emperor, who, as we know, does not allow the world to forget the old greatness of the Brandenburgers, has followed his forbear's example, and raised a monument in glorification of the death of his forty-four pointer, we cannot say. Anyhow, the marble monument erected by the first of the Prussian Kings was still standing within the memory of living persons.



Earliest Picture of Lady Riding Astride
By Tempesta (1555-1630)